

1982) imply specialisation of the genus *Circus* to prey hidden amongst rank vegetation. Long tarsi would assist in reaching such prey, and so it has been suggested that differences in tarsus length proportionate to body size in the harriers are linked to the height of vegetation in their preferred hunting habitats (Nieboer 1977). For example, the Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* has long tarsi and forages in tall marsh vegetation. However, no clear distinction between Montagu's and Pallid Harriers in habitat preference has yet been identified, but a marked contrast has been discovered in their prey preferences. Pallid Harriers most often hunt for passerines, whereas Montagu's Harriers specialise more in lizards, large Orthoptera, and probably nest contents (Clarke 1996).

In Accipiters, long tarsi occur in species that hunt for flying prey and shorter tarsi in those living on ground-dwelling prey (Wattel 1973). Long tarsi could give Pallid Harriers an edge in striking at fleeing birds. Adaptation to more agile prey is also evidenced by the greater reversed sexual dimorphism (Newton 1977) in this species as compared to Montagu's Harriers, as well as their streamlining in wing shape and larger foot size.

In summary, tarsal measurements are a quick and easy method to check the identity of all museum specimens of adult female Montagu's and Pallid Harriers.

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Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan* at South Georgia

by Keith Reid

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On 20 January 1997 at 18.45 (local time) an unusual gull was seen flying around Freshwater Bay, Bird Island (54°01'S, 38°03'W). When first noticed the bird was flying over the beach, after which it landed briefly on the shore before flying off to the southeast and out of sight. The initial impression was of a small buoyant gull, compared to the resident Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*, recalling Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, with noticeable long dark wings and a distinct dark marking on the head.

It was watched for approximately 5 minutes in good light through 7 × 42 binoculars at a range down to 20 m and the following description taken. Head—forehead, lores, chin and throat white; crown, nape and ear-coverts dark, forming half hood extending to just in front of eye. Eye dark with distinct pale upper and lower eye crescents. Bill dark and approximately equal in length to the loral distance. Upperparts—mantle and wing coverts dark grey, outer primaries darker and lacking pale mirrors. Inner primaries and secondaries with pale tips forming whitish trailing edge contrasting with dark secondary bar and outer primaries. Tail white with distinct black sub-terminal band. Underparts—white.

In examining the possible species involved it is apparent that this bird belonged to one of the group of small gulls which have dark head markings in adult plumage. Within this group three species which regularly occur in South America—Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*, Andean Gull *L. serranus* and Grey-headed Gull *L. cirrocephalus*—can all be ruled out as they have much paler grey mantle and wing-coverts which form a very characteristic wing pattern (Harrison 1983), different from the bird in question. This leaves Laughing Gull *L. atricilla* and Franklin's Gull *L. pipixcan*, both of which have a much darker grey base colour across the wings and mantle. Although the Laughing Gull shows a distinct dark subterminal tail band in first winter plumage it has generally grey, not white, underparts (Grant 1982). In addition the Laughing Gull's bill is longer than the loral length, often appearing "heavy and drooping" (Grant 1982). Franklin's Gull has a distinctive dark half hood with white eye-crescents in all plumages and first winter birds show a distinct dark subterminal tail band (Grant 1982). From this combination of plumage and structural characters the bird was identified as a first winter Franklin's Gull.

Other than Kelp Gull, which is a common resident, Dolphin Gull *L. scoresbii* is the only other gull species confirmed on the South Georgia list (Prince & Croxall 1996). A single record of Brown-hooded Gull was considered unacceptable by Bourne (1988) as the description published (Delany *et al.* 1988) could apply to a second winter Franklin's Gull. Although Brown-hooded Gulls breed in southern South America,